

THE HOUSE OF GOD ADVENT COURSE

SESSION TWO " THE HOUSE OF PRAYER"

Welcome to the second session of this Advent Course.

Recently I spoke after a Church service to a young lady from who is a Muslim convert to Christianity. She was full of the Spirit with an absolute faith in our Lord Jesus.

CMP 752 When He comes, we'll see just a child

Reading: *ISAIAH 56: 1 - 8*

Salvation for Others

1 This is what the Lord says: "Maintain justice and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed. 2 Blessed is the one who does this—the person who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath without desecrating it, and keeps their hands from doing any evil." 3 Let no foreigner who is bound to the Lord say, "The Lord will surely exclude me from his people." And let no eunuch complain, "I am only a dry tree." 4 For this is what the Lord says: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant—5 to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will endure forever. 6 And foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant—7 these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations." 8 The Sovereign Lord declares—he who gathers the exiles of Israel: "I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered." (ISAIAH 56: 1 – 8)

The Lord says through his prophet Isaiah "Let no foreigner who has bound themselves to the Lord say, The Lord will surely exclude me from His people".

The word exclude means to shut out, this means more than the building. We can exclude so called foreigners from leading worship, holding positions within the Church family, having a say in the direction the Church may be taking.

QUESTION 1

Why did the eunuch say I am only a dry tree? In what ways can anybody feel like a dry tree in our Church Family?

When the Methodist Church at Chandler's Ford was extended to build the Dovetail Community Centre, in the new wall that divided the Sanctuary from the Coffee Room are bricks with the names of all the then current worshippers of the Church engraved on them. My name is on that wall. In v5 God says to the eunuchs "I will give them WITHIN my temple a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters"

On Remembrance Sunday we gather round a memorial to those who gave their lives in the two World Wars. Their names are written for us to remember. The Hebrew word in v5 for memorial means remembrance.

QUESTION 2

What makes a true Christian? and what makes a false Christian?

QUESTION 3

Read v6-7: Because there can be perceived "Foreigners " within our own nation. Can those of a different faith be gathered in?

Remember the Magi were foreigners with almost certainly a different faith outlook from the Jewish nation.

"I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered"
Jesus in *John 10 v14-16* talks about having other sheep.

14 "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. (JOHN 10: 14 – 16)

The Hebrew word gather means to assemble, not just as a Lego building but to put back together , something that is broken?

Humanity was broken apart with the Fall [*Genesis 3*]. I wonder if the Incarnation of Christ and the Cross is the start of this process. God in Jesus is putting His creation/people back together again.

QUESTION 4

If the above is correct. How do we fit those of the lesbian, gay and transgender community fit into this? Or do you think God still excludes them? We do not know who may be in our congregations this Christmas.

At Christmas we celebrate the arrival of a baby , the one who will be great and called the Son of the Most High.[*Luke 1v32*]

The Israelite nation had found that their salvation was Close at Hand and would soon be revealed. And His house will be called a House of Prayer. However Jesus called the Temple in Jerusalem a den of robbers.

QUESTION 5

Remember in session 1 I said that the Hebrew word for house means household or family. What practical ways have we or can we make our place of worship a House of Prayer?

Paul reminds the Corinthian Church that they as individuals are God's Temple or dwelling place [*1Corinthians 3v16*]

QUESTION 6

What practical way can each of us make ourselves this Christmas a House of Prayer?

Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus.

A House of Prayer or a Den of Robbers, one builds up the other snatches away.

Help me to become a House of Prayer for you, a dwelling place of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

Make my whole life a prayer for you, not just twenty minutes on a Sunday but a life where I wake with prayer on my lips and at the end of day rejoice with prayer on my heart.

Father God lift me up in prayer.

Lord Jesus add my prayers to your intercessional prayer ministry in glory Holy Spirit give my unsaid and weak prayers the power of your ministry.

Our Father [SAY the Lord's Prayer].

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Peter Castle September/October 2021